



New Canaan Public Schools

School Facility Master Plan Recommendations

July 2025



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Study Purpose

New Canaan Public Schools (NCPS) desires to develop a Long-Range Plan and Vision that:

- Fulfills longstanding goal to move to a K-5 and 6-8 grade configuration consistent with peer districts.
- Aligns facilities with modern educational programming needs and provides flexibility to for future needs.
- Creates smaller learning communities by shrinking the student population at the elementary and middle schools.
- Modernizes elementary facilities to maintain New Canaan's high standards for facilities and educational delivery.
- Supports projected enrollment growth.
- Provides the framework for future detailed architectural and engineering studies.



Process

Task 1:

Conditions and Trends

- Enrollment Projections
- Capacity & Utilization Study

Task 2:

Master Planning

- Site Analysis and Test Fits
- Scenario Planning
 - High Level Cost Estimates
 - Timeline
- Recommendations

Task 3:

Next Steps (Phase I Grant)

- Educational Specifications
- Additional Due Diligence – Geotechnical, Phase I ESA, Site screening
- Grant Application (6/30/2026 deadline)



Challenges: Elementary School Capacity

- Schools should strive for 90% to 95% of the Planning Capacity to provide space for enrollment growth throughout the year and provide resilience to enrollment “bubbles.”
- NCPS is projected to see elementary enrollment grow by about 9% or 140 students over the next six years.
- Overall utilization is projected to grow to over 100% districtwide by the midpoint of the projections, with the greatest enrollment pressures at East and West.
- Utilization near or over 100% exacerbates operational impacts (larger class sizes, shared rooms for specialists, programs moved to carts, etc.).

Projected Utilization, by School (Based on Medium Projections)

School	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	First 5-Year Avg	Planning Capacity (PK-4)
East School (K-4)	99.6%	99.8%	100.9%	102.2%	104.7%	105.6%	106.7%	106.1%	104.7%	103.8%	104.0%	102.6%	556
South School (K-4)	88.8%	90.9%	92.9%	93.9%	96.3%	97.4%	97.4%	97.0%	95.9%	94.8%	94.8%	94.3%	537
West School (PK-4)	92.3%	94.2%	96.0%	98.8%	100.4%	103.1%	103.3%	103.3%	101.7%	101.2%	101.0%	98.5%	521
Total PK-4	93.7%	95.0%	96.7%	98.3%	100.5%	102.0%	102.5%	102.2%	100.8%	99.9%	99.9%	98.5%	1,614

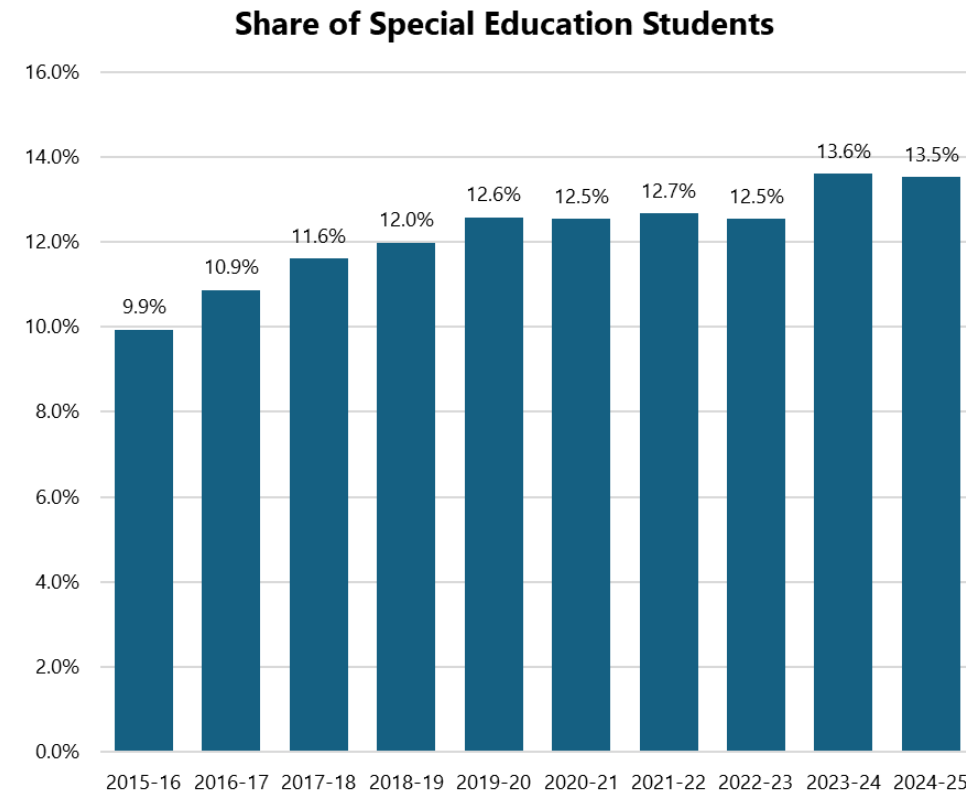
95% to 100% Utilization: Approaching Planning Capacity – potential for operational impacts

100% to 110% Utilization: Operational impacts (larger class sizes, shared rooms for specialists, less resilience to “bubbles,” programs moved to carts, etc.)



Challenges: Evolving Space Needs

- Buildings were renovated for yesterday's educational program.
- All three elementary schools were last renovated in 1997 and were designed to meet the educational program of that time.
- All elementary school buildings have a shortage of small and medium sized spaces for these services.
- Increasing number and share of students with special education needs over the last decade.
- Increased staffing for special education and support services.
 - Lack of purpose-built space for many of these services.
- NCPS recognizes the need to modernize spaces across all elementary schools to meet 21st century teaching and learning needs.



Source: CT State Department of Education



Challenges: Size and Grade Configuration

- New Canaan operates larger elementary schools than its peers with an average enrollment of 504 students, compared to a peer group average of 408 students.
- Peer districts operate K-5 and PK-5 elementary schools, while New Canaan operates on a K-4 and PK-4 model.

Elementary School Size: Peer Analysis

District	Number of Elementary Schools	Grade Configuration	Avg. Enrollment (10/1/2024)
Darien	5	K-5/PK-5	445
Greenwich	11	K-5/PK-5	356
Westport	5	K-5/PK-5	485
Peer Average			408
New Canaan	3	K-4/PK-4	504

Based on October 2024 Enrollment from the CT State Department of Education. Enrollment is inclusive of Pre-K and special programs



Challenges: Limited Pre-K Space

- Pre-K program located at West ES (5 classrooms).
- Lack of purpose-built space to support Pre-K students. Existing Pre-K classrooms consist primarily of retrofitted K-4 classrooms.
 - Three Pre-K classrooms lack in-room toilets.
 - Limited space for support staff.
 - No separation from K-4 academic spaces.
- Due to space constraints at the elementary schools, NCPS has limited opportunities to expand its Pre-K program offerings under the status quo.





Challenges: Size of Elementary School Sites

- Elementary School sites not conducive to expansion
 - Sites are too small to support K-5 grade configuration across three schools.
- State Guidance recommends a minimum of 15 acres of developable land for an elementary school with 500 students.
- All three elementary schools have a developable area of 12 to 13 acres, slightly below the state guidance.
- Limited opportunities on sites to support building expansions and required site elements (bus drop off, parking, fields, playgrounds, etc.).
- Existing core spaces (gym, cafeteria, media center) are not easily expandable to support larger student population.

School	Developable Area (acres) *	* Notes
East ES	13 acres *	Total site is 20 acres. However, 7 acres are inaccessible and separated from the school by a stream corridor.
South ES	12 acres	None
West ES	12 acres *	Total site is 47.5 acres. The remaining portion of the site is forested and consists of moderated sloped areas and wetlands.
State Guidance	15 acres	Minimum developable land required for an elementary school with 500 students.



Challenges: Middle School Size

- Saxe Middle School is one of a handful of middle schools in the state with a 5-8 grade configuration.
- **Saxe Middle School is much larger than peer middle schools and has the highest enrollment of any middle school in Connecticut (as of Fall 2024).**
- NCPS seeks to move to a 6-8 grade configuration, which would allow Saxe Middle School to operate at a lower enrollment and bring NCPS into a consistent grade configuration with its peers.

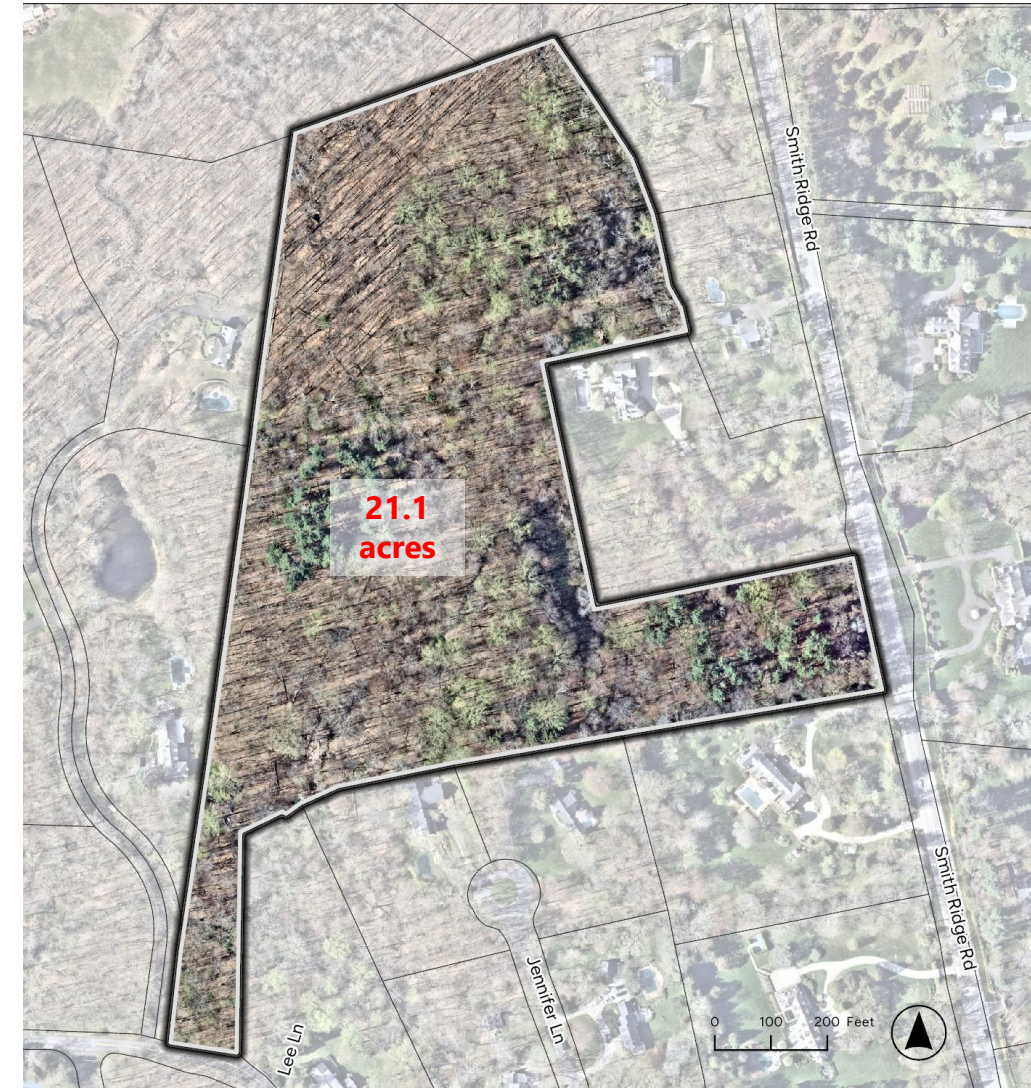
Middle School Size: Peer Analysis

District	School	Grade Configuration	Enrollment (10/1/2024)
Darien	Middlesex MS	6-8	1,043
Greenwich	Central MS	6-8	483
Greenwich	Eastern MS	6-8	797
Greenwich	Western MS	6-8	563
Westport	Bedford MS	6-8	710
Westport	Coleytown MS	6-8	484
Peer Average			680
New Canaan	Saxe MS	5-8	1,271



Opportunities: Clark Property

- The Clark Property, located on Smith Ridge Road (SR 123), is the only undeveloped town-owned site that is large enough to support a new elementary school.
 - 21.1 acres (larger than 15-acre minimum per state guidance).
 - Primary access off Smith Ridge Road (State Road).
 - Potential emergency access off Michigan Road.
- Site located in the northern part of New Canaan, the only part of Town that lacks an elementary school.
 - Currently students in this area are bussed to either East or West.



Recommendations



Recommended Actions

Phase 1

Build a 4th Elementary School

- Build a new North 4th Elementary School on the Clark Property.
- Target enrollment of approximately 470 to 500 students.
- Approximately 80,000 SF building – in line with three existing elementary schools.
- Allows the district to move towards a K-5 alignment.

Phase 2

Alterations of Existing Elementary Schools

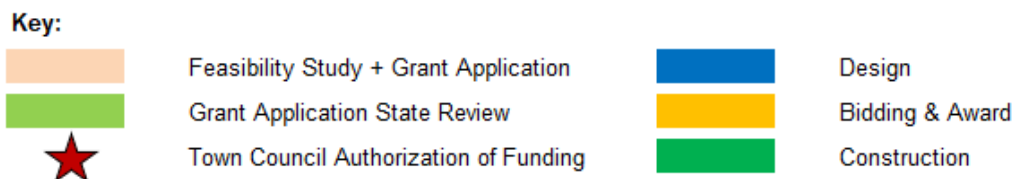
- Alterations of the remaining elementary schools concurrently.
- Align facilities with today's educational program delivery.
- Address facility condition needs.
- Create parity between existing elementary schools and new school.
- Move to K-5 alignment.
- Right-size elementary schools to approximately 470-500 students each.

Phase 3

Reconfigure & Retrofit Saxe Middle School

- Once 5th grade moves to the elementary schools, lower level of Saxe MS would be vacated.
- Lower Level would be fit out to house the districtwide Pre-K program (Relocated from West ES) and Districtwide Central Office.
- Move to a 6-8 alignment
- Shrinks enrollment at the middle school.

NCPS should align short-term decision making with the Long-Term Plan



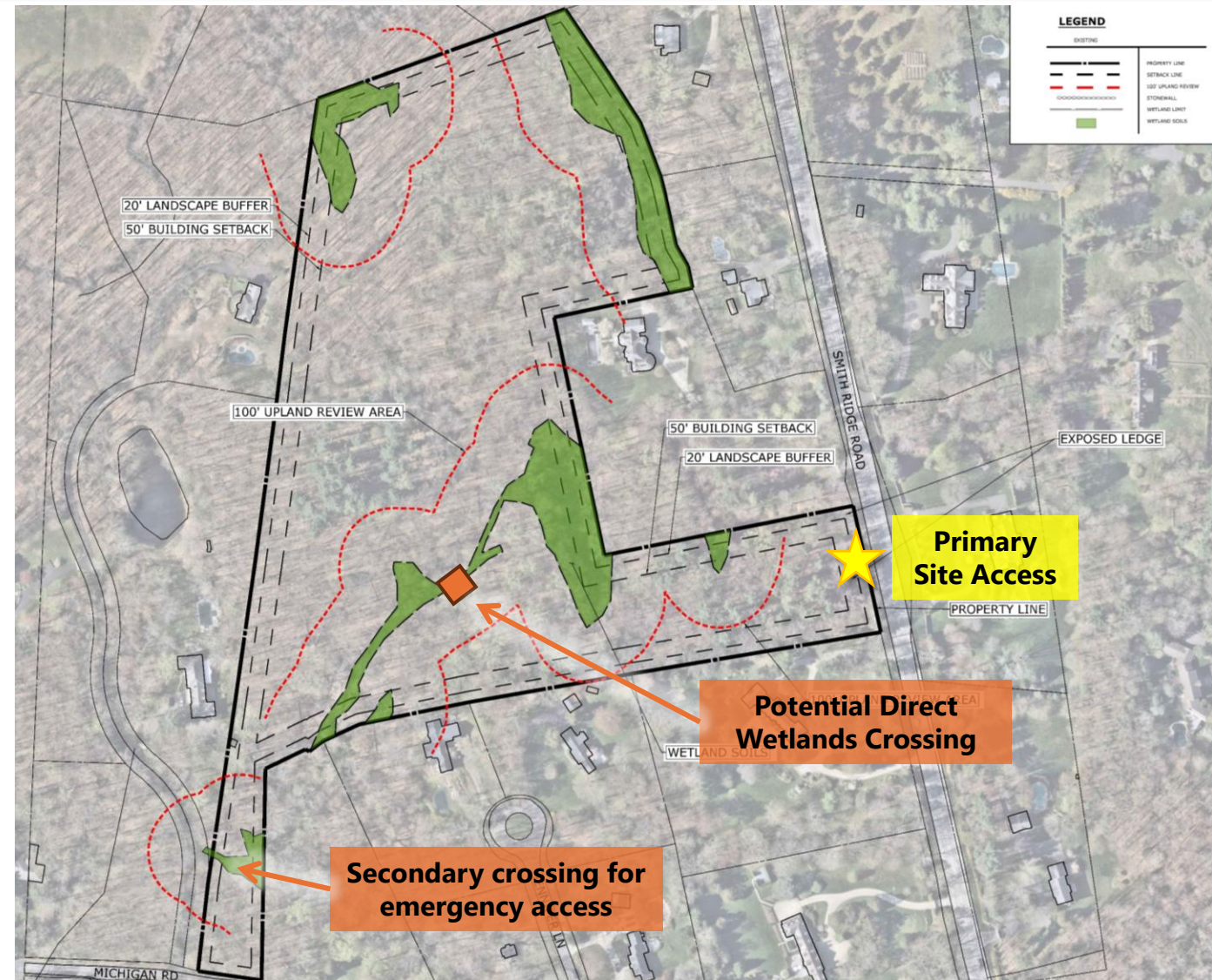
- June 2026 grant application for Phase 1 (New North School)
- June 2028 grant application for Phase 2 (Concurrent Extension/Alteration of existing elementary schools)
- June 2029 grant application for Phase 3 (Extension/Alteration of Lower-Level of Saxe Middle School)



Phase 1: Build New North School

Site Understanding:

- Wetland corridors on site would need to be crossed to access buildable portion of site.
 - Minimize wetland impacts and disturbance within upland review area.
- No public utilities – would need to be served by septic and well.
- Some moderate and steep slopes on site.
- Developed residential area – need to provide buffers to neighboring properties.
- Limited accessibility – no parking or public amenities





Phase 1: Build New North School

Architectural “Test Fit”

- Approximately 80,000 SF building located in the center of the buildable area.
- Compact building footprint (assumes two story academic wing).
- Long access road.
 - Separation of bus and parent loops.
- Retain as many trees as possible.
- Retain robust landscape buffers.
- Minimize impacts to neighbors.
- Minimize wetland crossings and disturbance to upland review area.
- Opportunities to enhance public access to property.





Phase 1: Build New North School

Architectural “Test Fit”

- Parking is broken into smaller sections and can step down the topography – will help with water detention.
- Playfields are very accessible to the public
- Building is clearly zoned, with separation of public core spaces and academic spaces.





Phase 1: Build New North School

Utility Assessment

- SLR reviewed feasibility of on-site utilities (well and septic).
- Septic system and leach fields located on north side of building.
- Two potential well locations identified, located on higher elevations to the south of the building.
- Well should be sited at a higher elevation with 100' offsets from property lines, septic system, and underground detention systems.
- Need for underground fire suppression tanks.
- Utility locations to be verified and finalized with soil testing.





- Opinion of Probable cost ranges developed based on initial Test Fit.
 - Includes escalation to the mid-point of construction and soft costs.
 - Costs should be further refined and finalized upon completion of the Educational Specifications and detailed conceptual design.
- **Cost of building a new Elementary School on the Clark Property is estimated to range from \$98 to \$109 million.**
 - Estimated town share ranging from \$90 million to \$100 million taking into consideration state reimbursement rates and ineligible costs.

Notes:									
1	Costs shown above are rounded to the nearest \$1,000,000								
2	Net Cost to New Canaan - figures are not guaranteed								
3	Low end of range - values DO NOT represent full Renovation, they represent various level of Alteration to South, West and East Elementary Schools								
4	High end of the range - values contemplate full Renovation of South, West and East Elementary Schools								
5	Roof replacement is not contemplated within the low end of the range budgets above for South, West and East Elementary Schools, nor for Saxe MS								
6	Building envelope improvements will be selective based on actual design and budget								
7	Limited site improvements are included, but not a full site renovation for South, West and East Elementary Schools and Saxe MS								

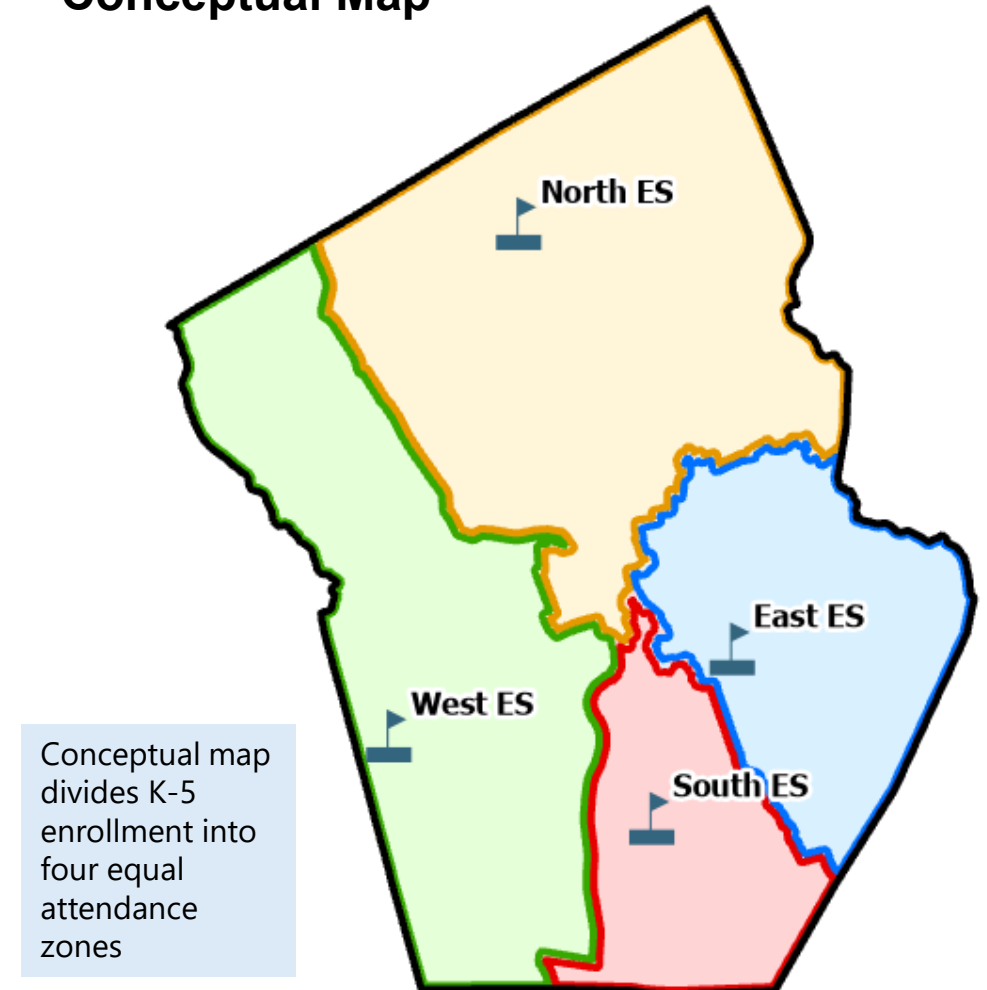


Phase 1: Build New North School

Attendance Zones

- Provides an elementary proximate to students living in northern part of Town.
 - Four “quadrants”
 - Shorter bus rides.
- New attendance zones would need to be established for the North School upon opening (Fall 2030 at the earliest).
- Comprehensive redistricting will need to be undertaken to fill out available space at North ES, facilitate the K-5 elementary alignment, and balance enrollment across all four schools.
- Attendance zones should be developed and finalized 12 months prior to implementation (Fall 2029).

Conceptual Map





Phase 2: Alterations of Existing Elementary Schools

- **District should conduct a detailed architectural and facility condition assessment to define the scope of these projects.** It is recommended that this is undertaken after the Educational Specifications for the new North School are developed, which will define the desired education program for a K-5 elementary school.
- Upon completion of the new North Elementary School, the district would undertake alterations to the three remaining elementary schools.
 - Align facilities with district's educational program.
 - Address facility condition needs.
 - Create parity between existing elementary schools and new school.
- Alterations would begin in the summer of 2030 (at the earliest).

Considerations

- Concurrent alterations would condense schedule (assumed in opinion of probable cost).
- Maintain a K-4 alignment until alterations are completed, resulting in fewer students in the building during construction. Schools move to K-5 alignment upon completion of projects.
- Potential for Pre-K to swing into another location (North ES?) to facilitate alterations at West.



Phase 2: Alterations of Existing Elementary Schools

- **Scope of alterations has not been defined. District should conduct a detailed architectural and facility condition assessment to define the scope and cost of these projects.**
- Cost ranges from a low of \$75 million to a high of \$196 million depending on scope of project.
 - Low range assumes light alterations of most space, with more intensive alterations in a limited number of spaces.
 - High range assumes intensive alterations of the whole building.
 - Includes escalation to the mid-point of construction and soft costs.

Preliminary ranges – Scope has yet to be defined. Subject to refinement as part of architectural and facility condition assessment

	East Elementary School		West Elementary School		South Elementary School	
	Low Range	High Range	Low Range	High Range	Low Range	High Range
Construction Costs	\$ 17,000,000	\$ 51,000,000	\$ 18,000,000	\$ 51,000,000	\$ 18,000,000	\$ 51,000,000
Soft Costs	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 11,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 11,000,000	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 11,000,000
Escalation	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 4,000,000
Total	\$ 24,000,000	\$ 65,000,000	\$ 25,000,000	\$ 65,000,000	\$ 26,000,000	\$ 66,000,000
Potential Town Share	\$ 20,000,000	\$ 55,000,000	\$ 21,000,000	\$ 55,000,000	\$ 22,000,000	\$ 56,000,000
Potential State Share	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 10,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 10,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 10,000,000

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- 4 High end of the range values contemplate full Renovation of South, West and East Elementary Schools.
- 5 Roof replacement is not contemplated within the low end of the range budgets above for South, West and East Elementary Schools, nor for Saxe MS.
- 6 Building envelope improvements will be selective based on actual design and budget
- 7 Limited site improvements are included, but not a full site renovation for South, West and East Elementary Schools and Saxe MS.



Phase 3: Reconfigure and Retrofit Saxe

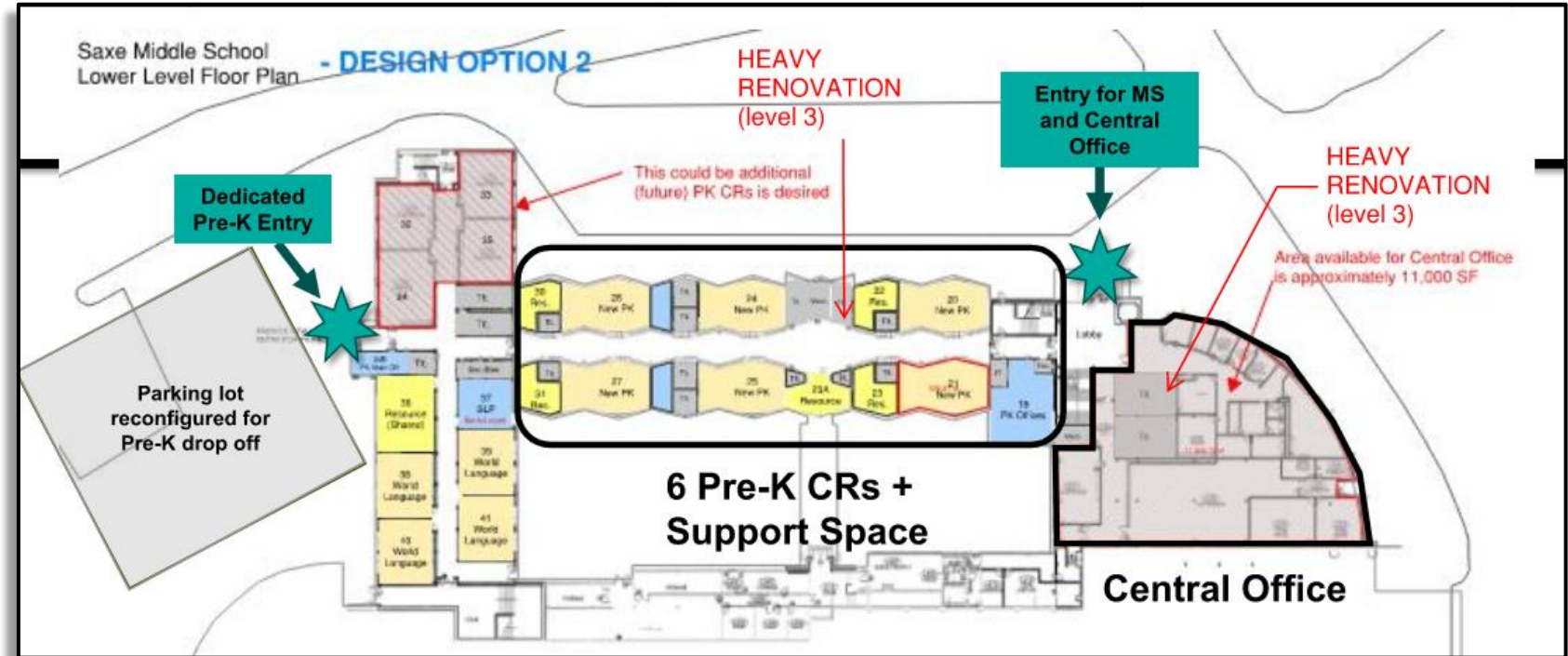
- Once elementary school alterations are completed, the district would move to the K-5 alignment and the lower level of Saxe would be vacated
 - 6th grade would move upstairs to current 5th grade wing.
 - Lower Division and Upper Division offices would be consolidated.
- Construction would occur once Phase 2 is completed (completion for Fall 2032 at the earliest)
- Lower-level classroom space would be retrofitted into 6 Pre-K classrooms, plus support space.
 - Opportunity for Pre-K program expansion, if desired by the district.
 - Some site reconfiguration to accommodate Pre-K play and drop off (potential locations are courtyard, bus drop off lane, and small parking area to north).
- Lower Division office space would be outfitted into districtwide central office space.



Phase 3: Reconfigure and Retrofit Saxe

Saxe Lower-Level Concept

- Existing classrooms would need to be enlarged, with toilets added.
- Creation of smaller space for resource rooms and support services.
- Potential for dedicated Pre-K entrance and parent loop.
- Separation of Pre-K from middle school academic spaces and Central Office.





Phase 3: Reconfigure and Retrofit Saxe

Opinion of Probable Cost

- Opinion of Probable cost ranges developed based on initial Concept.
 - Includes escalation to the mid-point of construction and soft costs.
 - Costs should be further refined and finalized upon completion of the Educational Specifications and detailed conceptual design.
- Cost of fitting out the lower level of Saxe MS is estimated to be between \$21 million and \$23 million
 - Estimated town share ranging from \$18 million to \$20 million taking into consideration state reimbursement rates and ineligible costs.
 - Different reimbursement rates for Central Office and academic spaces.

	Saxe Middle School (PK+Central Office)		Saxe Middle School (PK Only)		Saxe Middle School (Central Office Only)	
	Low Range	High Range	Low Range	High Range	Low Range	High Range
Construction Costs	\$ 14,000,000	\$ 16,000,000	\$ 9,000,000	\$ 10,000,000	\$ 5,000,000	\$ 6,000,000
Soft Costs	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000
Escalation	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000
Total	\$ 21,000,000	\$ 23,000,000	\$ 13,000,000	\$ 14,000,000	\$ 8,000,000	\$ 9,000,000
Potential Town Share	\$ 18,000,000	\$ 20,000,000	\$ 11,000,000	\$ 12,000,000	\$ 7,000,000	\$ 8,000,000
Potential State Share	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 3,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000

Total Project Costs

Pre-K Component

Central Office Component

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- Roof replacement is not contemplated within the low end of the range budgets above for South, West and East Elementary Schools, nor for Saxe MS.
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- Limited site improvements are included, but not a full site renovation for South, West and East Elementary Schools and Saxe MS.



Cost Summary

Town of New Canaan - Opinion of Probable Costs - Elementary School Facility Plan

PRELIMINARY DRAFT								
A	Summary - Elementary School Facility Plan	Building Area	Range Total Project Cost		Range Cost to New Canaan		Range Cost to State	
			Low	High	Low	High	Low	High
1	New Construction for North ES - K-5 for 480 students	80,000	\$ 98,000,000	\$ 109,000,000	\$ 90,000,000	\$ 100,000,000	\$ 8,000,000	\$ 9,000,000
2	Modifications to South ES - K-5 for 480 students	80,049	\$ 26,000,000	\$ 66,000,000	\$ 22,000,000	\$ 56,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 10,000,000
3	Modifications to West ES - K-5 for 480 students	82,040	\$ 25,000,000	\$ 65,000,000	\$ 21,000,000	\$ 55,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 10,000,000
4	Modifications to East ES - K-5 for 480 students	82,185	\$ 24,000,000	\$ 65,000,000	\$ 20,000,000	\$ 55,000,000	\$ 4,000,000	\$ 10,000,000
5	Modifications to Saxe MS for PK Center	16,576	\$ 13,000,000	\$ 14,000,000	\$ 11,000,000	\$ 12,000,000	\$ 2,000,000	\$ 2,000,000
6	Modifications to Saxe MS for Central Administrative Offices	10,790	\$ 8,000,000	\$ 9,000,000	\$ 7,000,000	\$ 8,000,000	\$ 1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000
7	Estimated Total Program Cost		\$ 194,000,000	\$ 328,000,000	\$ 171,000,000	\$ 286,000,000	\$ 23,000,000	\$ 42,000,000

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- Limited site improvements are included, but not a full site renovation for South, West and East Elementary Schools and Saxe MS.

Overall high-level opinion of probable cost range of \$194 to \$328 million, with town share of \$171 to \$286 million.

Note that much of the range is dependent on the level of renovation that is needed at the existing elementary schools.



Why the Recommended Plan?

- Fulfills longstanding goal of moving to a K-5 and 6-8 grade configuration.
- Creates an elementary school in the northern part of Town.
- Addresses capacity, condition, and educational programming needs at the elementary schools.
- Decreases the enrollment of the elementary schools and the middle school, resulting in smaller learning environments for students.
- Provides purpose-built space for Pre-K, with opportunities for program expansion.
- With recent investments in peer districts, this Plan maintains New Canaan's longstanding commitment to high quality education and facilities.



Summary of Next Steps

Phase 1

Build a 4th Elementary School

State Grant Application Process

- Update Enrollment Projections
- Develop Educational Specifications.
- Site Due Diligence (geotechnical, soil testing, Phase I ESA, etc.)
- Refine Conceptual Design and Cost Estimates based on Ed. Spec.
- Local Approval Process (8-24 approval, pass resolutions, funding approval)
- Prepare supporting grant application materials (June 2026)

Attendance Zones

- Attendance zones should be finalized 12 months before implementation (Fall 2029) to right-size enrollment across all four schools.

Phase 2

Alterations of Existing Elementary Schools

Architectural & Condition Assessment

- Define programmatic needs at each building (leverage Ed. Spec for new school)
- Develop conceptual designs and refine cost estimates.
- If state grant is pursued, follow same state grant application process as Phase 1. (June 2028)

Phase 3

Reconfigure & Retrofit Saxe Middle School

Design and Planning

- Develop Educational Specifications for Pre-K – determine space needs and potential for program expansion.
- Complete conceptual design and detailed cost estimate.
- If state grant is pursued, follow same state grant application process as Phase 1. (June 2029)